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dollars; this money to be used in payment for postage, printing and incidental expenses.

10. Address specimens and communications to the director of the Exchange.

Washington, D. C.

DR. GEO. VASEY,

Botanist, Department Agriculture.

EDITORIAL.

THE NOMENCLATURE of vascular plants seems to be in somewhat of a ferment. The law of priority every one recognizes, and that mile-stone in our progress has been passed long since. The application of the law is the question just now, and one that must be settled. The way of settling it is of far less importance than to have it settled. Fixity is what we must have, and we must have it even at the expense of some of our most cherished prejudices. Shall the law of priority apply only to the combined generic and specific name, or to the specific appellation as well? All of us have prejudices, backed by very good reasons as well as sentiment, in favor of one or the other of these views. But it will never do for us to go ahead in sublime indifference of each other. To what a chaotic state would such a proceeding lead? It is hardly the thing for a monographer to carefully study some group and publish his results in a paper in which relationships are the chief thing, and names of very minor importance; and then for some catalogue-maker to hunt through the synonymy and give different names to many of the plants in a publication in which names are the chief things. We must work together, or justice will never be done to those to whom justice is due. It has occurred to us that we could reach some uniformity of action, if not of opinion, that would save American botany at least from the chaos toward which it seems drifting. Prejudice and sentiment, and the names of plants, are all of so much less importance than uniformity that they ought to be laid aside for the sake of any sort of an agreement. Would it not be a feasible thing to have this subject discussed by the Botanical Club next August at Cleveland? Some plan might be devised by which the opinions of all working botanists could be obtained, and upon this basis some mutual understanding might be reached. At any rate, a full discussion would do no harm.

OPEN LETTERS.

The Exchange Club.

My attention has been called to an article of Mr. A. A. Crozier's in the last number of the GAZETTE, concerning the proposed Botanical Exchange. This article did not emanate from the committee. The objectionable point in the article seems to be an obscure intimation that under

certain circumstances there might be no fees, and that the interchange of specimens might be made free of postage. This idea arose from the fact that this department often franks packages of plants which are sent as contributions to the herbarium, and we were discussing the question whether this could be made available for packages where only a certain percentage of the specimens were to be so applied. But such a plan would be open to objection, and will not be entertained. Small packages are very cheaply transmissible through the mails, and botanists will be glad to avail themselves of such advantages. A set of rules for the Exchange is published in this number of the GAZETTE. GEO. VASEY.

Department of Agriculture, Washington.

What shall be done with our *Prosartes*?

The books give eight species as belonging to the American genus *Prosartes*, which would rest there undisturbed did not Bentham, in the *Genera Plantarum*, refer them all to Salisbury's Asiatic *Disporum*. The two genera are certainly exactly alike to all appearance, but had been supposed to differ in the position of the ovules, the Asiatic species having them pendulous from near the top of the cells, and the American ascending from near the base. But Bentham states that in one Himalayan species and in our *P. trachycarpa* he had found the ovules attached laterally near the middle—which surely leaves very slight basis for two genera. This is a pity, as it is an advantage to keep the groups apart on account of their difference of habitat, the generic name at once revealing the home of any species. Whether Mr. Bentham was right I am not enough of a botanist to decide, even if I had the specimens for an independent comparison of the species. Botanists in a small way like myself must be content under such circumstances to adopt the master's decision without question.

Taking it for granted, therefore, that *Prosartes* can no longer stand, the question arises, what authority is to be cited for the species when transferred to *Disporum*? Inasmuch as Mr. Bentham is known with certainty and by his own statement to have worked up the *Liliaceæ* for the *Genera Plantarum*, and there transfers the genus *Prosartes* to *Disporum* bodily, without exception or question, it would naturally seem right to cite him as the authority for the several species. Our species, then, should be written as they are given below in column A. But the *Genera Plantarum* was a joint work, and though the orders were portioned out so that some were revised by Mr. Bentham alone, and others by Dr. Hooker, yet the whole was so explicitly indorsed by both, and was so published under the names of both, that no part can be attributed exclusively to either. Consequently, instead of crediting the species to Bentham alone, they must be given to Bentham and Hooker, as in column B.

But now it is affirmed that this will not do; that Bentham and Hooker can not be cited as authority for a name which they never wrote; that in all Bentham's or Hooker's, or Bentham and Hooker's, writings, no mention can be found of a species *Disporum Menziesii*, nor of any of the others excepting *D. trachycarpum*, which alone is expressly mentioned in the *Genera Plantarum*. As for the rest, it is asserted that we do not know, and have no right to infer and say, that if Bentham and Hooker had written out the list they would have done it as below, for they might have united or dropped some of the species, or found some reason to alter the specific names, so that we are "making them say what they do not say," and virtually falsifying the record in citing them as authority. It is asserted that